

OBITUARY - Jessie Gilbert (30 i 1987 - 26 vii 2006 Pardubice). Early on 27 July, BCM heard the appalling news that the 19-year-old English women's international player Jessie Gilbert had died in tragic circumstances the previous day. She had fallen from an eighth floor window of a hotel in Pardubice, Czech Republic, where she had been taking part in the Czech Open tournament. Her death seems likely to have been as the result of a sleepwalking accident or suicide.

Jessie's first major success came in 1997 when she won the British Girls under 10 and under 11 titles. She received a lot of publicity for winning the women's world amateur championship in Hastings in 1999, scoring 5/10 ahead of three other contenders. In doing so she became a WFM and gained a rating of 2050, aged only 11.

She won the bronze medal at the European Girls' Under 14 Championship in 2001 and played for Perceptron Youth and Wood Green in the 4NCL, and for her local club, Coulsdon CC. She made her debut as a full England international in the European Team Championship in Gothenburg in 2005, and did creditably. This year she played on board 2 for England's women in the 2006 Turin Olympiad, scoring 5½/11 against tough opposition. Jessie was also brilliant academically, winning a place at Oxford to study medicine.

The editor's personal tribute: Having played Jessie twice myself, I was impressed by her calm determination and impeccable sportsmanship. She played very solid chess and had a good eye for a tactical opportunity. Jessie was polite, self-effacing and a role model for other girl players with whom she was hugely popular.

I particularly recall playing her at the 4NCL in 2003 when the first thing I did on arrival at the board was to point my camera at her. I always explain what is going on to opponents who might be bemused by the sight of a camera and this time I quipped "I don't take pictures of all my opponents!". Jessie giggled, I pressed the shutter and the result was a delightful photo which appeared on the June 2003 BCM cover (see p500). It has since appeared all over the world, but in the most tragic of contexts. RIP. Readers wishing to celebrate the life of an unforgettable girl should visit the website which has been set up in her memory – www.jessiegilbert.com.

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John Saunders, chess photo-journalist and author, editor of British Chess Magazine (www.bcmchess.co.uk) since 1999 and editor of the BBC Ceefax Chess pages since 1998. As a player, represented Wales at senior level in the European Team Championship.